United Nations A/HRC/WG.6/30/AZE/1

General Assembly

Distr.: General
16 February 2018
English
Original: Russian

Human Rights Council
Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review
Thirtieth session
7–18 May 2018

National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21*

Azerbaijan

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GE.18-02458 (E) 070318 080318

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I. Preparation of the report

1. A working group consisting of representatives of government bodies and the Presidential Council on State Support for NGOs was set up pursuant to a Presidential Order of 6 September 2017 to prepare the third national report of Azerbaijan in the framework of the universal periodic review mechanism. The Order also provided for representatives of the Office of the Procurator General and the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (the Ombudsman) to take part in the work of the working group. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinated preparation of the report.

2. In conformity with decision No. 17/119 of the United Nations Human Rights Council on follow-up to resolution 16/21 of the Human Rights Council on the universal periodic review, the third national report contains information on the implementation of the recommendations accepted during the second review, as well as on recent achievements in the promotion and protection of human rights in the country.

3. In 2016, an interim report on implementation of the recommendations accepted during the country's second review cycle under the universal periodic review mechanism was submitted to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

4. The draft of the third national report was posted on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website for comment from civil society and NGOs.

II. Measures taken in the area of human rights and implementation of recommendations

Cooperation with international human rights mechanisms

5. In 2013, Azerbaijan extended a standing invitation to all the special procedures of the Human Rights Council.

6. The following visits have taken place in the past four years:

- 26 November–5 December 2013: visit of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences
- 19–24 May 2014: visit of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons
- 16–24 April 2015: visit of a delegation from the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture
- 16–25 May 2016: visit of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention
- 14–22 September 2016: visit of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders
- 29 March–8 April 2016: visit of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- 3–7 July 2017: visit of the Advisory Committee on the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
- It had been agreed that the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation would visit the country in February 2015; at the request of the Rapporteur, the visit was cancelled owing to the tight schedule
- The Azerbaijani side proposed that the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association should visit the country in November–December 2016; the visit was postponed at the request of the Rapporteur

7. The Government of Azerbaijan has submitted the following reports over the past four years:

- In 2013, it submitted its fifth periodic report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was considered in 2015
- In 2014, it submitted its fourth periodic report on implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which was considered in 2015
- In 2014, it submitted its combined seventh to ninth periodic reports on implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which were considered in 2016
- In 2014, it submitted its fourth periodic report on implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was considered in 2016
- In 2016, it submitted its fourth periodic report on implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities to the Council of Europe
- In 2017, the Government of Azerbaijan submitted an updated common core document to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Azerbaijan submits annual reports on implementation of the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe

8. On 6 June 2017, in a statement to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-fifth session, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights named Azerbaijan as one of the 34 countries that had fulfilled their reporting obligations to the United Nations treaty bodies in a timely manner.

Participation in international human rights treaties

9. Since the second review cycle, Azerbaijan has ratified the following international conventions:

- Protocol No. 15 amending the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
- The Third Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Extradition
- The Protocol amending the Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters
- The Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism
- The Additional Protocol to the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption

10. As regards the accession of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, further internal coordination is required.

11. Azerbaijan is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, but understands that the protection of civilians, respect for human rights and humanitarian law and the fight against impunity for international crimes contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security and thus are the responsibility of the international community as a whole.

12. For that reason, the Republic of Azerbaijan was represented at the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, held from 15 June to 17 July 1998 in Rome, and participated in the adoption of the Final Act of the Conference. Azerbaijan continues to observe the activities of the International Criminal Court and is studying thoroughly the possibility of adopting

legal mechanisms for effective cooperation with the Court, to facilitate implementation of the obligations incumbent on the States parties to the Rome Statute.

13. Act No. 146IIIQ on the accession of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Convention against Discrimination in Education was adopted on 2 October 2006.

Improvement of national legislation

14. Azerbaijan is committed to the principles of the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. With the country's international commitments in mind, national legislation is constantly being improved and brought into line with international standards, including with regard to the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms. The recommendations of the relevant United Nations mechanisms are also taken into account in the process of improving legislation.

15. The following laws and regulations were adopted during the reporting period with the aim of bringing the country's legislation into line with its international obligations:

- The Migration Code (2 July 2013)
- The Code of Administrative Offences (1 March 2016)
- The Mandatory Childhood Health Checks Act (5 March 2013)
- The Act on Business Inspection Procedure and Protection of Business Interests (2 July 2013)
- The Public Participation Act (22 November 2013)
- The Ethical Behaviour of Municipal Employees Act (28 April 2015)
- The Citizens Appeals Act (30 September 2015)
- The Religious Extremism Act (4 December 2015)
- The Preschool Education Act (14 April 2017)
- The Unemployment Insurance Act (30 June 2017)

16. Following a referendum held on 26 September 2016, the Constitution was amended to provide more robust protection for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to establish effective and flexible governance mechanisms and to ensure the effectiveness of the economic reforms implemented.

17. Specifically, the changes included guarantees of protection and respect for human dignity, the prohibition of any abuse of rights, the protection of personal information, the right to fair treatment by public authorities in order to exclude arbitrariness, the civil liability of the State and public servants for harm caused to human rights and freedoms, the right of every individual to an impartial hearing in administrative and judicial review, as well as the possibility of recourse to the courts in respect of the acts or omissions of public authorities, political parties, legal entities, municipalities and public officials.

18. It should be noted that the National Plan of Action for More Effective Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in the Republic of Azerbaijan remains an integral part of the continued activities related to protecting human rights and freedoms in the country and includes, inter alia, improvements to the legislative and regulatory framework.

19. Under the presidential order approving the Plan, the executive authorities were requested, and the courts and the Office of the Procurator General were recommended, when applying the regulations, to step up their monitoring of compliance with national legislation in the area of human rights protection.

20. The Commissioner for Human Rights (the Ombudsman) coordinates the implementation of the Plan. The Office of the Ombudsman also continues to function as a mechanism for monitoring the protection of human rights and freedoms in the country. The Ombudsman prepares an annual report on the situation of human rights and freedoms and

submits it to the President. The report is also submitted to the Milli Mejlis, the National Assembly.

21. In order to coordinate activities aimed at guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of different categories of the population, the Office of the Ombudsman has a number of specialized advisers working on the rights of prisoners, of refugees and internally displaced persons, of elderly persons, of persons with disabilities, of children, of women and of members of the armed forces, and on combating torture and corruption. The specialized advisers regularly examine national legislation and international legal instruments pertaining to their areas of activities and prepare relevant proposals and plans of action.

Raising human rights awareness, training and education

22. Azerbaijan continues to implement measures to provide professional training and education for public officials, staff of the courts, the Office of the Procurator General and the Office of the Ombudsman, and municipal employees.

23. Under the Council of Europe Action Plan for Azerbaijan 2014–2016, the Academy of Justice, together with the Council of Europe and the European Union, has successfully implemented projects on: Support for Increased Efficiency of the Courts, Improved Training of Judges and Judicial Self-governance in Azerbaijan; and Application of the European Convention on Human Rights and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights in Azerbaijan.

24. In October 2016, the Academy of Justice and the Prison Service, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), held training sessions on the updated Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, with the participation of international experts.

25. In January 2017, the Ministry of Justice began a joint project with the Council of Europe on reforming the prison system. The aim of the project is to bring the quality of health care for prisoners and prison staff into line with European standards and best global practices. The project will include skills enhancement for medical staff working in prisons and professional development for guards.

26. Training courses have been held for judges of various courts of first instance in the framework of cooperation between Azerbaijan and the European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP). In 2017, the Council of Europe and the Academy of Justice jointly organized further training courses for staff of a number of different courts on article 6 (right to a fair trial) and article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

27. Regular training courses are held on the study and application of European Court case law, with the participation of international experts.

28. From time to time, the Ministry of Internal Affairs develops curricula and teaching materials on human rights. More than 80 per cent of the training carried out locally concerns human rights and freedoms.

29. The State Migration Service Training Centre organizes training courses for staff of the various government departments on the human rights of migrants, the prohibition of torture, violence and inhuman treatment and the necessary measures to be taken in this area. A total of 35 training courses on human rights were run by the State Migration Service alone over the reporting period.

30. As part of its outreach programme, the Central Election Commission focuses on raising awareness among young people and first-time voters and, in conjunction with the relevant State bodies and civil society institutions, organizes various seminars and training sessions to encourage active participation in elections.

31. Each year, the Committee on the Family, Women and Children organizes activities in conjunction with State bodies and NGOs to raise awareness of human rights among public officials and professionals, including through the media.

Civil and political rights

Freedom of thought and expression, freedom of information

32. The promotion of freedom of thought and expression and the freedom of information are key in building a State based on the rule of law and civil society in Azerbaijan. Government information policy is directed at ensuring consistent and comprehensive guarantees of the constitutionally recognized freedom of thought and expression and the right of citizens to receive information.

33. In conformity with article 50 of the Constitution, State censorship of the media, including the press, is prohibited.

34. Freedom of thought and expression is guaranteed by the Constitution and other relevant legislation. In order to ensure the effective exercise of this right, the Government has initiated various measures to guarantee the freedom of the media and to strengthen their financial and technical resources. The measures include reduced taxation on the media, the provision of loans, payment of their debt from the State budget and direct financial support.

35. The Government regularly provides financial assistance from the State budget to the Presidential State Fund to Support the Development of the Media. Financial support is allocated primarily for the development of freedom of thought, expression and information, to support the independence of the media, for professional development for journalists, to strengthen their social protection, and to fund projects and programmes aimed at the development and improvement of their work.

36. There are currently more than 5,000 media outlets in Azerbaijan. Another relevant factor is the rapid growth in the number of Internet users in the country, which now exceeds 78 per cent of the total population.

37. It should be noted that the Broadcasting Act regulates the legal, economic and organizational foundations of television and radio broadcasting with the aim of guaranteeing every person the freedom of information, opinion and speech and the right to open and free discussion. The Act has been examined by Council of Europe experts and found to be consistent with international standards. Foreign radio stations are not banned from broadcasting in Azerbaijan and are barred only from national frequencies. The aim of this is to promote the development of local media and, to that end, priority access to broadcasting on national frequencies is given to local radio stations. As in European countries, foreign radio stations are able to broadcast in Azerbaijan on short wave, as well as through the Internet, by cable and by satellite.

38. The bill on defamation initiated by the Government has been discussed with the Venice Commission. On the basis of the Commission's findings in 2013, international practice is being studied further, taking into account the balance of interests of society, given the existence of mixed approaches to its application.

39. As part of the joint Council of Europe-European Union project on freedom of expression and freedom of the media in Azerbaijan, a round-table discussion was held in Baku on 31 May 2016 on the topic of defamation.

40. All the conditions have been established in Azerbaijan for the free operation of representatives of the media, human rights defenders and civil society actors, allowing them to fully enjoy their rights and freedoms, and they are not subjected to any kind of harassment.

41. National legislation prohibits the use of pressure or physical violence against representatives of the media or local human rights organizations. Guided by the principle of the equality of all before the law, only persons suspected of having committed a specific offence may be charged, irrespective of their position or type of activity.

42. All offences, including against journalists and human rights defenders, are fully investigated, appropriate measures are taken and perpetrators are prosecuted and duly punished.

Freedom of assembly

43. Freedom of assembly is guaranteed by the Constitution and international agreements to which Azerbaijan is a party and is regulated by the Freedom of Assembly Act.

44. The Act provides that no restrictions may be placed on the freedom of assembly other than such as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

45. Under article 5 of the Act, the local executive authorities must be notified in writing of the route of any march through the streets, and of the place and time of the assembly, in order to facilitate coordination and any necessary measures. A reasoned decision in respect of the assembly is sent to the organizers within three working days. At the same time, restrictions necessary in a democratic society and provided for in the law may be applied in accordance with national legislation.

Freedom of conscience

46. There is a high level of religious tolerance in Azerbaijan, international conferences and meetings are held on religious topics, and discrimination between citizens on the basis of their religious beliefs is prohibited.

47. The State registration of religious communities active in the country is based on the requirements of the Freedom of Religion Act. Article 12 of the Act provides that religious institutions may operate only once they have been registered and included in the State register of religious institutions.

48. As at 1 October 2017, 783 religious communities were officially registered. Of those, 755 were Muslim and 28 were non-Muslim religious communities (17 Christian, 8 Jewish, 2 Baha'i and 1 Krishna Consciousness community).

49. The State Committee on Cooperation with Religious Organizations provides an expert assessment of religious literature (in print and on electronic devices), audio and video materials, goods, products and other religious materials, and monitors their production, importation and distribution and their sale in specialized sales points, after labelling with a reference mark.

50. Religious literature and other religious materials may be imported and distributed freely only after assessment and labelling by the State Committee. Restrictions apply only to literature that promotes religious extremism, terrorism and ideas contrary to the principles of patriotism or calls openly for social resentment and hostility.

Right of association

51. Under article 58 of the Constitution, everyone has the right to create any association, including a political party, trade union or any other voluntary association, or to join an existing association.

52. Appropriate legislation, including laws on political parties, trade unions and NGOs, has been adopted to guarantee that right.

53. The Government continues to take consistent measures to support civil society. The implementation of legislative and institutional reforms in the area, the adoption of the Framework for State Support for NGOs and the establishment of the Presidential Council on State Support for NGOs create favourable conditions for the development of those organizations.

54. The "personal electronic window" information system has been set up to facilitate information sharing between NGOs and State agencies; it offers information as provided for in the law and reports in electronic form, as well as other e-services.

55. Azerbaijani legislation does not make it mandatory for local NGOs to register officially as legal entities. Local NGOs may conduct their activities without being officially registered.

56. Under Act on Registration of Legal Entities and the State Register, official registration is mandatory for commercial organizations and offices or subsidiaries of foreign legal entities. A bill on social sector procurement has been drafted with the aim of the further development of civil society.

57. On 21 October 2016, the Head of State signed a decree on the application of the single window principle to the procedure for the allocation of grants by foreign donors in Azerbaijan; the aim was to support the activities of civil society, facilitate procedure for the allocation of grants by foreign donors, ensure transparency and target available funds. The single window principle has been in operation since 1 January 2017.

58. In 2017, in implementation of the decree, the government decision concerning the regulations governing registration of agreements on the allocation of grants and the rules on eligibility of foreign donors to award grants in Azerbaijan was modified.

59. This has led to positive changes to the process of authorization to award grants:

- The donor does not have to apply directly to the Ministry of Finance for authorization to award the grant. The person in receipt of the grant has the same right.
- The whole procedure is implemented by the coordinating agency (Ministry of Justice), which must ensure that the procedure for authorizing the right to award the grant, through the submission of documents to the Ministry of Finance and then registration of the grant, is completed in one day.
- The number of documents required for the donor to receive authorization to award the grant and for it to be registered has been halved, and legal certification of certain documents is no longer required.
- The period of examination of the documents submitted to receive authorization to award the grant has been halved.

60. Neither the Ministry of Justice nor any other authority has the right to intervene in the internal affairs of NGOs. Disputes between an organization and its members are resolved by the courts on the basis of applications from the members.

61. A platform for dialogue between the Government and civil society was set up in 2016 under the National Action Plan for Open Government, 2016–2018. Ten State bodies (including the Office of the President) and all interested NGOs are represented on the platform.

62. There are currently more than 3,200 NGOs registered in Azerbaijan. Around 500 of them work in the area of human rights. In 2017, the Presidential Council on State Support for NGOs funded 484 NGO projects, to a total of 3,049,900 manats. Ninety-eight of the projects directly concern human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Right to vote

63. Political parties representing different political interests, coalitions of political parties and referendum advocacy groups are guaranteed free and voluntary participation in elections and referendums in the country.

64. The observation of elections is regulated by the Electoral Code. The electoral process is monitored by observers on their own initiative or on the initiative of a registered candidate, political party, coalition of political parties or referendum advocacy group, or on the initiative of an NGO working in the area of elections.

65. Elections held in Azerbaijan attract many local and international observers and are closely reported by local and foreign media. For the municipal elections held in 2014, there were 50,551 local observers; for the elections to the Milli Mejlis in 2015, there were 503 international observers from 40 international organizations and 65,818 local observers; for the referendum in 2016, there were 117 international observers from 18 international organizations and 53,531 local observers.

66. During the 2016 referendum on amendments to the Constitution, an exit poll was conducted by four bodies, two of which were working with authoritative international organizations (AJF & Associates, Inc. from the United States of America and OpinionWay, a French sociological research institute).

67. With webcams installed in 1,000 polling stations, Internet users were able to go onto the webpage of the Electoral Commission and directly observe the voting process, the vote counting, assessment of the results and the preparation of the official reports on the outcome of the vote.

Reform of the judicial system

68. The measures taken to ensure the independence of the judicial system, improve the functioning of the courts and court infrastructure, establish a single Internet portal and the "electronic court" information system and to introduce electronic services have significantly improved the provision of legal aid to citizens, ensured transparency and responsiveness and enhanced the efficiency of judicial decision enforcement.

69. Pursuant to a presidential order of 13 February 2014, citizens may submit electronic applications to the courts. As part of the Judicial Services and Smart Infrastructure Project, conducted jointly with the World Bank, the single Internet portal of the judiciary (www.courts.gov.az) has been updated and an "e-Court" section added.

70. The Road Map to Support Small and Medium-sized Businesses, adopted by presidential decree on 16 March 2016, provides for the early establishment of a mediation body, the creation of an appropriate legislative framework, the establishment of a mediation council and other organizational matters.

71. To that end, international experience has been studied and proposals drawn up offering potential models for a mediation body for the country. An agreement has been reached with the Council of Europe and the European Union on joint projects in this area.

72. In the framework of the Judicial Modernization Project, conducted jointly with the World Bank, the court administration has been equipped with modern information and communications technology. New high-performing buildings have been opened for the court complexes in Sabunçu and Şəki, Yasamal and Narimanov district courts in the capital, and Ganja, Oğuz, Gadabay, Quba, İmişli and Qabala district courts. Modern premises are currently being built for eight courts.

73. Experts from the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice of the Council of Europe commended the Government of Azerbaijan for the work done in effectively reforming the justice system, establishing a unique judicial infrastructure, and introducing the latest information technologies and innovations.

74. In October 2017, Azerbaijan was awarded the prize for its project "Court Pulse — The Management Revolution" in the Crystal Scales of Justice competition of the Council of Europe.

Improved prison conditions

75. In February 2017, the President signed a decree on improving the prison sector, humanizing penal policy and expanding the use of alternative forms of punishment and non-custodial measures.

76. The decree provides for modernization of the prison sector, the upgrading of prison infrastructure, improved monitoring of conditions for convicted prisoners, the expansion of production facilities, the formation of a trained prison workforce, the organization of appropriate protection for facilities, improved transparency and the prevention of cases that create conditions favourable to corruption and other negative phenomena.

77. To organize effective oversight of the enforcement of non-custodial sentences and improve governance in that area, the decree provides for the establishment of a probation service under the Ministry of Justice. The President has also instructed the Government to prepare a list of electronic monitoring devices that may be used on convicted persons and the regulations governing them.

78. The Criminal Code was amended by an Act of 20 October 2017. The approximately 300 amendments introduced included the decriminalization of 15 types of offence, the introduction of non-custodial penalties for 158 offences and the exemption of 22 offences from criminal liability, subject to reconciliation with the victim and redress.

79. Pardons and amnesties are widely used in Azerbaijan. Over the past five years, the President has issued nine acts of pardon, applicable to 1,378 convicted prisoners. During the same period, the Milli Mejlis has also approved two Amnesty Acts covering 21,000 persons.

80. Six new prisons are under construction: they include a prison facility for women and juveniles in Baku, a prison complex in the village of Umbaki and prisons in the towns of Ganja, Lenkoran and Kyurdamir.

81. The Government attaches particular importance to cooperation with international organizations in the area of prisons. From 16 to 24 April 2015, members of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture undertook a visit to Azerbaijan, during which they visited police stations, pretrial and temporary detention facilities, remand centres, prisons, psychiatric hospitals and social welfare institutions.

82. An agreement has been reached on a further extension of the agreement signed in 2000 with ICRC, under which that organization's representatives have the right of unimpeded access to places of detention in Azerbaijan.

83. Work on improving medical care for prisoners is continuing. Modern medical equipment is being purchased, new diagnostic methods are being introduced, exchanges of experience are being conducted with other countries and improvements are being made to the organization of the medical service. In the framework of the provision by ICRC of psychosocial care in prisons, training courses are being held for psychologists working for the prison service.

84. All the modern methods recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) for identification and laboratory diagnosis (including molecular and genetic diagnosis) of tuberculosis are used in the country's prisons. Azerbaijan was the first country in the world to use a new rapid test for tuberculosis, which gives an accurate diagnosis in a very short time (100 minutes), in its prisons. There has been a reduction every year over the past 20 years in the incidence of tuberculosis in prisons, and the number of deaths from tuberculosis has fallen 100-fold. A WHO collaborating centre on tuberculosis in prisons, the only such centre in the world, was opened in Azerbaijan in 2014.

85. In accordance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (the Ombudsman) has been designated as the national preventive mechanism. Thus the national preventive group is based in the Office of the Ombudsman.

86. The Ombudsman and the national preventive group have the right, at any time, without hindrance and without prior notification, to visit and monitor police stations, places of pretrial detention, remand centres, prisons and psychiatric institutions, as well as places where persons who cannot leave voluntarily are detained.

87. In addition, the Public Affairs Committee of the Ministry of Justice, which is composed of prominent human rights defenders and representatives of human rights NGOs, also has the right to unimpeded access to prisons, to hold individual meetings with prisoners and to learn about their conditions of detention. Since it was set up, the Committee has carried out more than 660 unimpeded visits to various penal institutions in the country.

88. In line with the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), gender equality is respected and the staff of specialized correctional facilities for women and of the special remand centre corps are female.

89. The health screening of women prisoners on entry into remand centres includes comprehensive screening to determine primary health-care needs and to identify any

contagious diseases. Pregnant and breastfeeding women may not be held in punishment cells. Women's facilities and remand centres have provision for the children of women prisoners under the age of 3 years. The children's meals and improved living conditions are paid for by the State. Women prisoners are provided with information on the prevention of diseases, including HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Women's facilities and remand centres have in-house female psychologists.

Combating corruption

90. The National Action Plan for Open Government, 2016–2018, was approved by a presidential decree of 27 April 2016. It includes improvements to anti-corruption legislation, the development of proposals for corruption-related offences, mitigation of liability for economic crimes and their decriminalization, awareness-raising in the fight against corruption, measures to improve electronic services and greater participation of civil society and the public.

91. Encouraging the public to play a direct role in the management of public affairs, public oversight over the activities of central and local authorities and cooperation with the public are important components in ensuring transparency in public entities. To that end, the Public Participation Act was adopted on 22 November 2013.

92. Suggestions, statements and complaints submitted by the public to State agencies are important tools in the promotion and protection of human rights. In this regard, the Citizens' Appeals Act, aimed at informing the local and central authorities about violations of the law, was adopted on 12 November 2015.

93. Under a presidential decree of 5 February 2013 approving the Statutes of the e-government portal and measures to expand electronic services, a number of government services were included in the e-government portal so as to provide a single window for electronic services.

94. A presidential decree of 3 February 2016 provided for the establishment of appeals boards in central and local executive bodies to ensure transparency and objectivity in the treatment of complaints made by corporate entities and business persons.

95. To improve the provision of quality public services using innovative methods, the network of centres of the State Agency for Services and Social Innovations under the Office of the President (ASAN) and the list of services provided are being continuously expanded.

96. ASAN service centres now offer more than 250 services provided by 10 government agencies and a number of private companies. They have considered more than 17 million applications since they were first set up.

97. ASAN service centres exist in the regions as well. Public services are also available in the regions through vehicles fitted with special mobile ASAN service equipment.

98. In 2015, the Agency launched ASAN Radio 100 FM, a pioneering project aimed at providing the necessary information to a wider audience by radio.

99. In 2015, ASAN was awarded the prestigious United Nations Public Service Award.

100. The ASAN Visa portal was launched in 2016 to simplify the procedure for issuing visas to foreign nationals and stateless persons wishing to visit Azerbaijan.

101. ABAD (Simplified Support for Family Businesses) centres were established in 2016 to support citizens playing an active role in the country's socioeconomic development, the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, greater employment and the formation of competitive family businesses.

Implementation of the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking

102. The National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, 2014–2018, is being implemented. The Government has taken account of the recommendations of the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) and has amended the procedure for the repatriation of victims of trafficking. The Programme

for the Social Rehabilitation and Reintegration into Society of Child Victims of Trafficking and the guaranteed amount of social services provided from the State budget to persons or families in difficulty were adopted pursuant to government decisions of 6 February and 22 April 2014.

103. Further government decisions of 2 June and 14 October 2015 introduced new provisions into a number of regulations and rules governing transparency in the management and disbursement of aid for trafficking victims and the involvement of NGOs in the activities of special facilities caring for such persons.

104. In 2016 and the first nine months of 2017, 133 victims of trafficking were assisted with reintegration into society: 43 were given employment and sent on vocational training courses. Single payments were made to 130 victims. Forty-nine young children being cared for in shelters (31 in 2016, 18 in the first nine months of 2017) were included in different educational programmes.

105. Records show that 117 young victims of trafficking being looked after in shelters joined various educational programmes: 31 of them were supported through the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and 35 through the Azerbaijani Children's Association, benefiting from alternative education programmes, logical thinking and health care.

106. In 2016, the Centre for the Victims of Trafficking, run by the State Social Protection Fund of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, provided 93 victims of trafficking with social, legal, medical and psychological assistance.

107. During the first six months of 2017, 60 such persons were given various types of assistance and sent to the Centre for Victims of Trafficking.

108. Some of those individuals were provided with several types of assistance at the same time, in accordance with their needs. Fifteen persons received legal assistance, 20 received psychological support and 12 persons received medical care. With the assistance of the State Employment Service under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, measures were taken to provide employment for eight individuals, and two persons were placed on training courses.

109. The measures taken to prevent trafficking and forced labour, to protect victims and to raise awareness in this area were commended in documents produced by the Council of Europe, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other international organizations.

Economic, social and cultural rights

Economic development and social policy

110. Priorities at the current stage in the country's socioeconomic development include ensuring its sustainable and balanced economic development and accelerated development in the regions.

111. The State Programme for the Socioeconomic Development of the Regions of Azerbaijan, 2014–2018, is being implemented. The State Industrial Development Programme for 2015–2020 has been adopted.

112. The National Coordinating Council on Sustainable Development was established under a presidential decree of 6 October 2016. The relevant road maps were approved by presidential order on 16 March 2016. They cover 11 major economic sectors and include an economic development strategy and action plan for 2016–2020, a long-term perspective to 2025 and a targeted perspective for the post-2025 period.

113. Significant steps were taken during the reporting period towards the creation of industrial and technological parks and industrial zones, with eight industrial parks established. The industrial parks, which meet contemporary demands and have a competitive production infrastructure, play an essential role in ensuring the country's balanced economic development, introducing innovative management and advanced technologies, creating new productive sectors and providing employment.

114. Over the past 14 years, about 34,000 entrepreneurs have been granted preferential loans to an amount of more than 2 billion manats. Of that total, 76 per cent were allocated to the regions and 24 per cent to areas of Baku. Business incubators have been set up in regional development centres in the towns of Xaçmaz and Yevlax to support individuals starting businesses.

115. The country's gross national product has increased by 8.9 per cent over the past five years, standing at 60.4 billion manats in 2016. Overall, 1.68 million jobs were created between 2003 and 2016, 1.26 million of them permanent. During the first nine months of 2017, some 226,000 new jobs, including 171,000 permanent posts, were created.

116. The economic reforms have contributed to a rise in the standard of living among the population, resulting in a growth in real household income of 21.1 per cent over the period 2012–2016, to 45.4 billion manats in 2016.

117. A sample-based survey of the economically active population, conducted in line with International Labour Organization methodology, showed that the economically active population in 2016 — 5,012,700 persons — was 6.9 per cent higher than in 2012, the number of those persons who were employed had risen by 7.1 per cent to 4,759,900 and unemployment had fallen from 5.2 per cent to 5.0 per cent.

118. Over the first nine months of 2017, US$ 8.3 billion were invested in the country's economy, mostly from abroad.

119. Large projects to establish transit facilities in Azerbaijan have been implemented. These include, in particular, the international seaport and shipbuilding yard, the TRACECA transport corridor and work on the North-South and East-West transport corridors. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, which forms part of the Silk Road and is the shortest link between Europe and Asia, was commissioned on 30 October 2017.

120. The successes achieved by Azerbaijan in recent years have been reflected in the reports of international organizations and financial institutions. In the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness 2017–2018 report, Azerbaijan ranks thirty-fifth out of 137 countries.

121. In 2017, the city of Baku was nominated as a candidate to host World Expo-2025. The theme of the exhibition — "Developing Human Capital, Building a Better Future" — and the subthemes — "Talent: the future of education", "Vitality: the future of health" and "Achievement: the future of work" — align with three of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, as expressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

122. Comprehensive measures aimed at strengthening the Government's social policies continue to be implemented. The State Programme on Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development, 2008–2015, and the State Programme on Social and Economic Development in Baku and its Villages, 2011–2013 and 2014–2016, aimed at eradicating poverty in the country, are being implemented.

123. As a result of the targeted steps taken in the framework of the programmes, the poverty rate fell from 6 per cent in 2012 to 5.9 per cent in 2016. The average monthly nominal wage of a worker in 2016 was 1.3 times the 2012 figure, at 499.8 manats.

124. In accordance with various presidential decrees and orders, the amount of pensions and social benefits increased by more than 10 per cent on 1 February 2016.

125. As at 1 January 2017, 558,100 members of 132,400 families were receiving targeted State social assistance and 368,800 were allocated social benefits. To end the dependence of low-income families on social assistance, "self-support" single-payment social assistance programmes have been introduced for the first time in the country.

126. There are growing numbers of projects on sustainable clean drinking water supplies and renovation of sewerage networks. Currently, the Water Supply and Sanitation in Small Towns project is being co-financed by the Azerbaijani Government and the Japan International Cooperation Agency. The project seeks to improve the use of water supplies and sanitation services, to a development timeline of 2030. Projects to rebuild the drinking

water systems in Qusar and Naftalan have been completed and the construction of drinking water and sanitation networks in Xaçmaz and Xızı is ongoing.

Health care

127. Much has been done to strengthen the financial and technical base of health care, with the building, renovation and reconstruction of new health facilities fitted with modern equipment, including in remote areas. The amount of the State budget allocated to health care increases each year. Over the past 14 years, over 500 health facilities have been refurbished and fitted with modern medical equipment. Several medical facilities have been built and are now operational; they include the Thalassemia Centre, which has already saved the lives of hundreds of people.

128. A total of 702.5 million manats was allocated to health care from the State budget in 2016, representing an increase of 42.4 per cent compared to 2011. That rise has made it possible to have 7.3 per cent more medical institutions in 2016 than there were in 2011, and 6.8 per cent more hospital beds.

129. The Government's health-care measures have led to a significant growth in the provision of medical services to mothers and children, patients with cancer and endocrine disorders and those suffering from hereditary blood diseases, chronic kidney disease and diabetes. Timely vaccination has achieved significant results in the fight against infectious diseases.

130. The Government continues to cooperate actively and implement joint projects with WHO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, the European Commission, the relevant United Nations bodies and other organizations.

131. New health centres with modern medical equipment and advanced technologies are being set up in the regions under the State Programme for the Socioeconomic Development of the Regions of Azerbaijan, 2014–2018.

132. Azerbaijan is continuing its work to combat diabetes. The State pays constant attention to provision for the treatment and prevention of diabetes. The 2016 State Programme on Assistance to Persons with Diabetes, 2016–2020, is being implemented.

133. Azerbaijan was the first of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States to adopt a government diabetes programme, under which virtually all patients with diabetes are provided with free treatment and medical supplies — good quality insulin and blood glucose meters.

134. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation has a number of projects aimed at raising public awareness of diabetes. It also collaborates with foreign companies that have a wealth of experience in treatment of the disease. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health is also working on the prevention and treatment of many diseases, including cardiovascular diseases and thalassemia, in adults and children.

Reproductive health

135. A number of projects introduced at the beginning of 2017 are aimed at preventing sex-selective abortion and educating young people in this area. The projects are being supported by the office of the United Nations Population Fund and the representation of the European Union in Azerbaijan, with the participation of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the State Committee on the Family, Women and Children.

136. With the support of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, measures have been taken to raise awareness about reproductive health in schools. A working group comprising representatives of the above ministries has also developed teaching materials on reproductive health for the general secondary level.

137. Improved mother and child health-care services is one of the main directions of State social policy.

138. The State Mother and Child Health-care Programme, 2014–2020, was adopted to improve the quality of treatment and preventive care for women and children in the country. Under the Programme, reforms to perinatal care, based on regionalization, are being extended, maternity clinics are receiving better equipment and awareness campaigns on reproductive health and family planning are being conducted.

139. The adoption of this Programme, the introduction of "electronic health maps" for newborns and the adoption of the Infectious Diseases Immunization Programme have played an important role in protecting women's and children's health.

Education

140. Improved educational facilities in the country and the reforms to the education system are helping to bring positive change in this area. State spending on education in 2016 was up by 38.3 per cent compared to 2011, to 1,754.4 million manats.

141. The literacy rate and the primary enrolment ratio grow each year. Over the past five years, the net enrolment ratio in primary education rose from 99.7 per cent to 99.8 per cent.

142. The gross enrolment ratio in education for 6–21-year-olds rose from 72.1 per cent in the 2011/12 academic year to 85.6 per cent in 2016/17. As of the beginning of the 2016/17 academic year, there were 4,452 daytime general education institutions, of which 348 provided teaching in other languages.

143. The number of preschools in the country in 2016 was 5 per cent higher than in 2011. As at the beginning of the 2016/17 academic year, there were 51 higher education institutions — 38 public and 13 private — in Azerbaijan, catering for a total of 163,779 students.

144. That figure is 14.4 per cent higher, or 20,633 more, than in 2011/12. At the beginning of 2016/17, 47.3 per cent of students were female and 52.7 per cent were male. The State pays the tuition fees of orphans and children without parental care living in State children's institutions.

145. Refugees and internally displaced persons studying in fee-paying State higher and secondary educational institutions are exempt from tuition fees. Children of refugees and internally displaced persons are provided with textbooks and teaching aids free of charge.

146. Foreign nationals and stateless persons accepted in institutes of higher education are given the necessary opportunities to receive an education. Foreign students have all legal rights and freedoms, including the right to apply to judicial and public bodies for protection of personal property, family and other rights. Foreign students are taught using the standard educational programmes and curricula adopted in the country's educational establishments. On completing their course of study, foreign students receive a government document showing their standard educational qualification.

147. Over the past five years, up to 6,000 young teachers have received compensation and additional allowances to go to teach in rural schools; this has had a positive impact on the quality of education there.

148. In 2016, on the initiative of the Ministry of Education, 10 higher educational establishments in the country set up the Maarifchi student loan fund, which is aimed at creating equal access to higher education by providing student loans. The fund is currently working with 14 universities in the country.

149. In grades 1 to 9 of general education schools, the "Man and society" section of the subject "World Knowledge" includes study of the key rights and obligations set forth in the Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Intercivilizational and intercultural dialogue

150. Azerbaijan continues to contribute to the development of multiculturalism and plays an active role in strengthening intercivilizational and intercultural dialogue.

151. On the initiative of the President, the Seventh Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations was held in Baku from 25 to 27 April 2016. During the Forum,

questions were raised about new challenges and threats, including the prevention of discrimination, xenophobia and racism, how to combat aggressive separatism and measures aimed at strengthening intercultural and interreligious dialogue and promoting multiculturalism.

152. The Baku Process, which was launched by the President in 2008, is an international forum for intercultural dialogue held every two years. It provides a platform for the coordination of international efforts to strengthen tolerance and understanding and combat discrimination, extremism and xenophobia in society.

153. The Baku International Multiculturalism Centre was established by presidential decree on 15 May 2014. Pursuant to the relevant presidential decrees, 2016 was declared the "Year of Multiculturalism" and 2017 the "Year of Islamic Solidarity".

154. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation makes a major contribution to the development of multiculturalism and tolerance in the country. One of the Foundation's projects, "Azerbaijan — the address of tolerance", includes the reconstruction and restoration of mosques, churches, temples, both in Azerbaijan and elsewhere. The Catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter in Rome were restored under a bilateral agreement between the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and the Holy See.

155. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation has also provided financial support for the restoration of five fourteenth-century stained-glass windows in Strasbourg Cathedral, carried out the restoration of works of art in the Park of Versailles Palace in Paris that have been on the World Heritage List since 1979, and assisted in the restoration of seven tenth-to-twelfth-century churches in the Department of Orne in France. It has also supported the restoration of the Capitoline Museums in Rome.

Rights of specific groups or persons

Promotion and protection of women's rights and gender equality

156. The Government is continuing to take systematic and coherent measures to raise awareness of and combat discrimination against women.

157. On 25 November 2014, the State Committee on the Family, Women and Children, together with the United States Agency for International Development, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme, Counterpart International and the Women's Association for Rational Development, has led a campaign to strengthen the role of women in social development.

158. Since 2016, the State Committee on the Family, Women and Children and the Azerbaijan Micro-finance Association have held special training courses for women on financial literacy and starting your own business.

159. Women's desire to be competitive in the labour market on an equal footing with men in the market economy and assert themselves in the new labour relations through their abilities, capacities and skills, provides an opportunity for their greater representation in governance, entrepreneurship and other areas.

160. As at 1 January 2017, 28.6 per cent of all public officials (30,090 persons) were women.

161. The measures taken in Azerbaijan have led to gender parity in secondary and tertiary education (the ratio of educated women to educated men in the 15–24 years age group is 100 per cent). In specialized secondary schools, girls represent 67.4 per cent of the total number of students.

162. The First Vice-President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Chair of the State Committee on the Family, Women and Children, the Chair of the State Examination Centre, 1 of the 3 Vice-Presidents of the Milli Mejlis, 3 deputy ministers, the deputy leader of the State Committee on the Family, Women and Children, the deputy leader of the Audit Chamber, 78 deputy heads within the executive authorities, the Minister of Culture and

Tourism of the Naxçivan Autonomous Republic, the Vice-Chair of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Naxçivan Autonomous Republic and the Chair of the Committee of the Naxçivan Autonomous Republic are women.

163. In the 2015 parliamentary elections, 21 of the 125 deputies elected were women. At the municipal elections held in 2014, 5,236 of the 14,963 municipal representatives elected and 302 municipal chairs were women.

164. There are approximately 180 women in the diplomatic service, including in leadership positions: 2 Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassadors, an Ambassador-at-large and 2 department heads in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

165. Women are also represented in the judiciary, with 58 female judges, including 7 in the Supreme Court, 12 in courts of appeal and 39 in courts of first instance, and women chairs of the Civil Division of the Supreme Court, the Sumqayıt Court of Appeal and the Jebrail District Court. There is also a woman judge on the Judicial Council. Over 1,200 women are employed in the judiciary, accounting for 20.3 per cent of the total number of actual staff. Seventy-six women hold senior management positions.

166. There are 2,810 women serving in the internal affairs agencies (1,274 are senior, middle-ranking or junior officers and 1,536 are members of the civilian staff), representing 10 per cent of the total personnel.

Domestic violence

167. In 2015, the State Committee on the Family, Women and Children set up a special database with information from various government agencies and rehabilitation centres for victims of domestic violence, and measures concerning rehabilitation, integration and the provision of legal assistance, as well as on the perpetrators of violence.

168. Special monitoring groups, with members from a number of State agencies, have been set up to prevent violence against women and children; centres for victims of domestic violence have also been opened.

169. Work to prevent domestic violence is being carried out in collaboration with women's and children's NGOs, the Council of Europe and other international organizations. There are plans to introduce "family psychologists" and to set up a monitoring mechanism for victims of domestic violence.

170. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and police forces in the country operate the 102 call centre, an information portal, an email address and a telephone hotline. In 2016 and the first 9 months of 2017, 10,304 offences against women, including 3,893 violent offences, were reported. Criminal cases were brought against 5,025 perpetrators.

Promotion and protection of children's rights

171. Legislation continues to be improved and practical measures taken to protect the rights of children in the country.

172. Pursuant to the 2012 State procedure for monitoring the implementation of children's rights, the State protects children, by social, legal, economic, medical and educational means, from all forms of exploitation and heavy, harmful or dangerous work and dangerous impacts and takes measures to eliminate or prevent the circumstances that lead to violations of their rights.

173. In 2016 and the first 9 months of 2017, measures were taken in cooperation with the UNICEF country office, the Baku office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Alliance of NGOs, in the context of the Children's Legal Clinic and the Children's Police Room to provide legal aid to 834 young children on the preventive list.

174. As at 1 January 2017, monthly social allowances were being paid to 71,900 children under the age of 18 with disabilities, 437 guardians of orphans or children deprived of parental care, as well as persons disabled by war, persons with class I and class II disabilities resulting from the Chernobyl disaster and children of long-service military personnel, regardless of income. Social monthly benefits were also paid to 2,657 families

for 2,707 children under the age of 1 year and to 3,100 women with more than five children, for 9,000 children. Single lump-sum allowances were paid on the births of 99,200 children.

175. The 2016 recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination have been taken into account in improvements made to national legislation. In paragraph 32 of its concluding observations, the Committee recommended that the Government should make the legislative amendments necessary to ensure that all children born in the State party are issued with a birth certificate, irrespective of the ability of the parents (in respect of foreign nationals and stateless persons) to present residence registration papers. Accordingly, paragraph 2.5.7 of the State Civil Registration regulations was amended by government decision on 21 July 2017.

176. It should be noted that Azerbaijan does not typically have social factors such as high levels of poverty and low levels of development, which are the main causes of conditions that lead to the sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography, child sex tourism and increased likelihood of children being exposed to such problems.

177. Around 25,000–26,000 crimes are committed in the country each year, approximately 2 per cent of them by minors. Based on the statistics of such cases, it would not seem expedient to establish juvenile courts, as they would not have a sufficient workload. It may be more appropriate in Azerbaijan to encourage judges to specialize in juvenile justice, as the law provides the necessary regulatory frameworks for the implementation of juvenile justice.

178. The rules on liability for corporal punishment of children are contained in the Criminal Code and the Code of Administrative Offences. In addition, the Domestic Violence Act includes measures to combat psychological, physical and other violations against children. Teachers are prohibited under the Education Act from using any physical or psychological violence against students.

Promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities

179. The Government is currently considering a bill on the rights of persons with disabilities that takes account of proposals and recommendations made by civil society organizations and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The bill is being drafted in line with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and covers the basic principles of State policy in this area, the prevention of disability, State guarantees and social welfare, habilitation and rehabilitation, employment and other areas.

180. The "Azerbaijan 2020: Look into the Future" framework covers the preparation and implementation of projects aimed at preventing isolation of persons with disabilities and ensuring unhindered access for them to social infrastructure, as well as increasing the number of social and vocational rehabilitation centres, which help them develop skills and capabilities, thus increasing their employment opportunities.

181. Pursuant to a presidential decree of 14 September 2015 on improving the system for assessing disability and special needs, a subsystem for medical and social expertise and rehabilitation, known as TSERAS, was introduced into the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection centralized information system. The introduction of the TSERAS subsystem has helped to ensure transparency in the assessment of disability and special needs.

182. The European Union twinning project launched in September 2017 that is supporting the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in the modernization of government employment services provides for new services to promote employment of persons belonging to vulnerable groups, especially persons with disabilities.

183. An Action Plan on Child Protection and Social Protection for 2016–2017 was signed on 18 May 2016 as part of the 2016–2020 programme of cooperation between the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and UNICEF. The Plan includes training courses on the basic principles and methods used in social inclusion services for children with disabilities.

184. In 2015, a pilot programme aimed at bringing children with disabilities into inclusive education in secondary schools was launched jointly with UNICEF. In 2016–2017, a pilot project on inclusive primary education was extended to six secondary schools.

185. On 14 December 2017, the President approved the State Programme for the Development of Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities, 2018–2024. The aim of the Programme is to provide equal access to all levels of education and to create a barrier-free environment for persons with disabilities.

186. Work is continuing to provide apartments and vehicles from public funds for persons with disabilities. In 2016, 252 homes (118 apartments and 134 individual houses) for persons in this category were built and handed over. During the first 9 months of 2017, 59 individual houses were constructed and allocated.

Promotion and protection of the rights of migrant workers

187. In accordance with article 25 (3) of the Constitution, the State guarantees equality of rights and freedoms, irrespective of race, ethnicity, religion, language, sex, origin, property or official status, beliefs or membership of political parties, trade unions or other voluntary associations.

188. No restrictions may be imposed on human and civil rights and freedoms based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, sex, origin, beliefs or political or social affiliation.

189. According to the Labour Code, any discrimination between workers on the basis of factors unrelated to their professional qualities, skills and job performance or the results of their work is prohibited, as is the allocation of benefits and entitlements or the restriction of rights based directly or indirectly on these factors.

190. In accordance with article 75 of the Migration Code, except in cases provided for in the Labour Code, migrant workers shall enjoy the same working conditions as those established in law for Azerbaijani citizens, and they shall be paid in the same way as is established in law for Azerbaijani citizens.

191. Any matters related to the employment of migrant workers that are not covered by the Migration Code are regulated by the Labour Code.

192. All the guarantees provided in the Constitution and other legislation or regulations apply to migrant workers and members of their families. Article 60 guarantees protection of the rights and freedoms of all in the courts. All persons have the right to fair treatment in cases involving them and to consideration of their case within a reasonable time in administrative or judicial proceedings.

193. In its activities, the State Migration Service examines the possibility of legalizing the residence of any illegal migrants discovered. If it is possible to legalize a person's residence in the country, the necessary steps are taken. During the period 2013–2016 and the first 9 months of 2017, 13,112 persons were accorded legal residence status in line with national legislation.

Refugees and internally displaced persons

194. Taking into account population growth, Azerbaijan is currently home to 1,200,000 refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

195. Using resources allocated from the State Oil Fund and other sources, 96 modern housing complexes with a total area of 3.2 million square metres have been built for IDPs in more than 30 cities and regions of the country.

196. A total of 152 schools, 58 cultural centres, 59 kindergartens and 2 Olympic sports complexes have been built in the new settlements, with 730 km of roads constructed and 965 km of water pipes, 1,625 km of electricity cables and 465 km of gas pipelines laid. Investment costs provided for in the State budget have been used to complete the construction of 762 houses for Ahiska Turks.

197. Over the past 14 years, the monthly food allowance for IDPs has quadrupled, while the volume of public services has increased by 4.5 times.

198. Pursuant to a presidential decree of 23 January 2017 on the introduction of a single monthly allowance for IDPs and persons of equivalent status temporarily residing in individual dwellings, such persons receive 36 manats each month.

199. Over the past 14 years, 200,000 of the 380,000 IDPs capable of working have been given permanent employment in State sector organizations and 161,000 have been provided with temporary employment. Under the loan agreement between the World Bank and the Government of Azerbaijan, 910 microprojects worth 125 million manats have been implemented. A further 24,000 IDPs have been granted loans valued at 14.8 million manats.

200. In 2016, a new agreement was signed with the World Bank for a total of US$ 78.5 million. Preferential loans in the amount of 40 million manats were granted through the National Business Support Fund to 2,000 IDPs to finance business investment projects. Over the past 14 years, the poverty rate among IDPs has fallen from 75 per cent to 12 per cent.

201. Article 39 of the Children's Rights Act provides that children are eligible for refugee status in Azerbaijan. The State takes appropriate measures to provide such children with the necessary protection and humanitarian assistance, organizes searches for their parents, cooperates with international organizations and provides the necessary support for the activities of NGOs. No requests for refugee status have been received from unaccompanied children during the reporting period.

III. Achievements, best practices and challenges

202. Azerbaijan will continue to protect and promote human rights and freedoms at the highest level, to fulfil the international obligations arising from the international treaties to which it is a party, to work closely with international organizations and to contribute to the development of multiculturalism.

203. As it has done in the past, Azerbaijan will continue to ensure the timely submission of its periodic reports to the United Nations treaty bodies and the relevant committees of the Council of Europe; it will also continue to implement its National Plan of Action for More Effective Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in the country.

204. However, Azerbaijan is not currently in a position to implement the provisions of the international human rights treaties to which it is a party in its territories occupied by Armenia. The Government of Azerbaijan does not bear any responsibility for violations of human rights and freedoms in those occupied territories until such time as they are liberated and the consequences of the occupation are fully eliminated.

205. The legal and political components for a settlement of the conflict are based on the norms and principles of international law, namely the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty and the inviolability of internationally recognized borders, as set out in United Nations Security Council resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993) and General Assembly resolution 62/243 (2008), together with the relevant documents and decisions of international organizations.

206. Seven hundred and thirty-eight historic sites, 14 memorial complexes and 1,107 cultural institutions in the occupied territories have been destroyed and looted. Three hundred and seventy-three mosques, ancient places of worship and other holy places have been looted and destroyed.

207. During its aggression against Azerbaijan, the Armenian side has committed gross violations of the norms of international humanitarian law; there have been numerous incidents of extrajudicial executions and mass shootings, torture and other cruel and inhuman treatment and punishment of peaceful Azerbaijani civilians, hostages and prisoners of war.

208. According to the State Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Prisoners of War, Hostages and Missing Persons, as at 12 July 2017, there were 3,868 persons on the list of missing citizens of Azerbaijan. The fate of two Azerbaijanis, Dilgam Askerov and

Shahbaz Guliyev, who were taken hostage by the Armenian side in July 2014, continues to be a matter of serious concern for the Government of Azerbaijan.

209. On 16 June 2015, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights adopted a decision in the case of *Elkhan Chiragov and others v. Armenia*. The case, dating from 6 April 2005, was based on a claim by six citizens of Azerbaijan against Armenia; they were unable to return to their homes and had been deprived of their property in the Laçın district of Azerbaijan, having been expelled in 1992 as a result of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In its judgment, the Court found continuing violations of the right to property, the right to respect for private and family life and the right to an effective remedy. The Court affirmed the right of internally displaced persons to property and to return to their homes. The Court concluded that Armenia, through its military presence and the provision of military equipment and expertise, had been significantly involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from an early date, and was responsible for violations of the rights of Azerbaijani displaced persons.

210. Between 2 and 5 April 2016, there was intense bombing of positions of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan and the civilian population residing in the areas adjacent to the line of contact. As a result of the heavy shelling by the Armenian side, soldiers and civilians were killed or injured, and homes, schools and other public buildings were destroyed.

211. The response of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan led to more than 2,000 hectares of strategic territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan being freed. Immediately after the April events, the President of Azerbaijan signed an order on the reconstruction of the village of Jojug Marjanly in Jabrayil district. Over a period of two months, part of the village was rebuilt, with 50 houses, a school and a mosque. Nine kilometres of road were built between Goradiz and the village of Jojug Marjanly.

212. On 4 July 2017, a targeted and deliberate attack by the Armenian armed forces on the village of Alkhanly in Fizuli district of Azerbaijan killed a 2-year-old girl and her grandmother and injured another woman.

213. The Republic of Azerbaijan once again calls on the international community to oblige Armenia to come to peace and withdraw its armed forces from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.